

MACAULAY'S USE OF AUTHORITIES

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The other power referred to is Brandenburg. During the reign of William III the Elector of Brandenburg had in England an agent called Frederick Bonnet. His letters throw a great deal of light on the domestic politics of the period and are particularly valuable for their accounts of the proceedings in Parliament. Ranke, who esteemed them highly, prints a large number in the appendix to his sixth volume and uses them to supplement and correct Macaulay.

This general survey shows that Macaulay had at his disposal and employed a number of authorities not used by previous historians, and that he was therefore justified in asserting many facts with a certainty denied to his predecessors. On the other hand there were many diplomatic sources which he did not consult, because they were inaccessible or unknown to him, so that his successors have been able to correct him on a number of points, and a historian writing to-day has it in his power to attain a greater amount of certainty than Macaulay could. Macaulay's dogmatism implies a kind of blindness, a failure to recognise the inevitable progress of historical knowledge, a mistaken conviction that the whole of the necessary evidence was before him.

However, the business of the historian is not only to

collect all the available materials but to make
sure that he
interprets the evidence rightly, for there is a
great difference in the value of witnesses. The
development of a more
scientific method of treating historical
evidence was one of
the great achievements of the nineteenth
century. Macaulay
stands outside this historical movement. He
does not
weigh the value of the evidence he employs,
with sufficient
care, if he is judged by the standards of to-
day. It is too
much to say, as some people have done, that
Macaulay is